



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**USS CONSTELLATION MUSEUM HONORS CREW MEMBER,  
COMMEMORATES ABOLITION OF SLAVE TRADE**

**WHAT:** USS *Constellation* Museum will honor a fallen crew member with a ceremony over 5,000 miles away from Baltimore on Ascension Island in the South Atlantic Ocean. An American flag, US Navy marker, and memorial wreath will be placed at the grave of Stephen Bayard Wilson Jr. as part of the museum's commemoration of the bicentennial of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

**WHEN:** Monday, June 2, 2008

**WHERE:** Ascension Island, South Atlantic Ocean

**WHY:** 2008 marks the bicentennial of the U.S. law abolishing the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. USS *Constellation* served as flagship of the US African Squadron from 1859-1861. The squadron was stationed off the coast of West Africa to protect American commerce and suppress the slave trade.

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For more information on *Constellation's* service off the coast of West Africa and the museum's commemorative plans see below or contact curator, John Pentangelo, at 410-539-1797, ext. 446.

**BACKGROUND:**

Stephen Bayard Wilson Jr. was the nineteen-year-old captain's clerk on board *Constellation* during her service as Flagship of the US African Squadron. The squadron's mission was to

protect American commerce and suppress the slave trade. While cruising off the coast of West Africa, near the mouth of the Congo River, *Constellation* captured three slave ships: the brig *Delicia* in 1859, the bark *Cora* in 1860, and the brig *Triton* in 1861. *Cora*, an American vessel registered in New York, contained 705 terrified Africans chained to her slave deck. Wilson was a member of a prize crew, a detachment of sailors and marines who sailed *Triton*, captured on May 21, 1861, back to the United States for a court trial. On June 2, 1861, several days after the prize crew set sail, Wilson succumbed to yellow fever, a disease that took the lives of many British and American sailors who served on this station. When *Triton* put in to Comfortless Cove on Ascension Island, his shipmates laid him to rest in Bonetta Cemetery. The Royal Navy frequently dropped sailors inflicted with the “coast fever” on Ascension so that they could recuperate. Those that died were buried in one of several sailors’ cemeteries including one named for HMS *Bonetta*.

The museum coordinated this commemorative ceremony with assistance from the Ascension Island Heritage Society. Members of the Society and the United States Air Force will place the wreath and conduct a small ceremony as the sun sets over the cemetery. Wilson was born in Clermont, NY but his parents married in Baltimore and several of his siblings moved to the city after his death. Many of their descendants still remain in the area.

The USS *Constellation* Museum will conclude its commemoration of the bicentennial of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade with a ceremony on board *Constellation* on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the 148<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Constellation*’s capture of the bark *Cora*.

Identical resolutions are presently before the US Senate and House of Representatives to recognize USS *Constellation* and her important role as flagship of the African Squadron just prior to the Civil War.